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Swimmers brave cold for a cause

Long Island Sound plunge helps raise funds to fight ALS

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RYE — The people gathered on Oakland Beach on New Year's Day stripped down to bathing suits, counted down from 10, then jumped into the 35-degree waters of Long Island Sound.

And they did it all to help those with amyotrophic lateral sclerosis, or ALS.

More than 100 people took part in Ray's Plunge to raise money for MAC's Angels, a nonprofit organization that provides resources, guidance and information on what is also known as Lou Gehrig's Disease.

"There is no better way to

kick off the New Year than to raise money for a vital cause," said Rich Mauch, executive director of MAC's Angels. "We are hoping to raise \$10,000."

Ray's Plunge was started 15 years ago by Ray Kelly of Rye after some friends dared him to jump in the water at the Edith Read Sanctuary.

"It caught on," he said.

The first few years, Kelly and others would take the plunge for causes such as leukemia and challenged athletes.

When Claire Collier, a friend's sister, was diagnosed with ALS six years ago, Kelly decided to focus on the disease. Collier died in 2009.

ALS is a neurological disease that causes muscle weakness, disability and eventually death.

Kelly was excited to take the plunge the first time since



Phil Gormley, at center wearing the blue cap, leads the charge into chilly Long Island Sound during Ray's Plunge, a benefit that supports ALS research, at Oakland Beach in Rye on Saturday. The fundraiser is held in memory of coordinator Phil Gormley's sister, Claire Collier, and others who passed away from ALS.

his second heart attack in 2008. "This a great cause and it is so much fun," he said. "It is a beautiful event."

"It is the largest turnout ever," said Phil Gormley of

Rye, Collier's brother. "It is a tremendous feeling of love and support to keep my sister's memory alive and to help others."

Ed Riley, 52, of Mamaro-

neck wore a green top hat, 2011 glasses and a fur coat over his swim shorts. He smoked a cigar as he waited for the festivities to begin.

"Phil is a great friend and I



Xavier Mascareñas/The Journal News

Swimmers hit the Sound for a cause

Eric Bittelman of Rye Brook yells out while arriving on shore after braving the chilly Long Island Sound during the annual Ray's Plunge, a benefit that supports ALS research, at Oakland Beach in Rye. The fundraiser is held in memory of coordinator Phil Gormley's sister, Claire Collier, and others who passed away from ALS. **LOCAL NEWS, 6A**

am happy to come out and support him," he said.

Maureen McCloskey, 43, said she wanted to start off the New Year giving back.

"I lost my sister, too," the Mamaroneck woman said. "As long as I am helping out, I am good. It is about what you give in life."

Bruce Palmer, 49, wore a lime green Borat-style thong leotard under black sweatpants. The Rye man came out with his wife, Sarah, and children Celia, 16, and Jim, 13.

"We have known Phil for years and we try to help with anything involving ALS," he said.

Toward the end of the event, everyone ran in the water and came back out quickly.

"It was cold!" 11-year-old Ben Grigg of Rye said. "I am 11 and today is 1-1-11 so I had to do this."

Ben's father, Doug Grigg, said it was a great experience.

"We had some friends who did this last year and said it was a blast," the 40-year-old said. "It is wonderful to kick off the New Year helping others."